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The God Varuna in the Rig-Veda

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THE GOD VARUNA IN THE RIG-VEDA

I. INTRODUCTORY: The Rig-Veda in Relation to the Present Awakening in India.

The Rig-Veda has the honour of being the oldest book in Indian literature and one of the oldest books in the literature of the world. It is at least as old, i.e., the hymns of which it is composed, as the Homeric cycle of poems, and it may possibly be much older. Scholars agree that the 1028 hymns which constitute the Rig-Veda *Sanhita* or Collection were edited about B. C. 600. That date then represents the final limit as regards authorship. How many centuries were covered by the composition of the hymns is a matter of uncertainty. In fact, as yet the chronology of the Rig-Veda is a chaos of conflicting opinions. The orthodox opinion in India is that the Vedas are eternal. Critical scholars are divided into two camps, those favoring an early date and those favoring a late date. Professor Hopkins of Yale, perhaps the greatest authority in the world on the Epic literature of India, and Professor Jackson of Columbia, well known as a Zoroastrian scholar, both agree in holding that the bulk of the Rig-Vedic hymns were composed during the two centuries 800-600 B. C. As Professor Hopkins puts it, "One thousand B. C. is not the lowest but the highest limit that we can reasonably set to the Rig-Veda, and 800 B. C. is probably nearer the mark, as far as the bulk of the Rig-Veda is concerned."[1] According to this view the earliest Vedic literature is contemporaneous with the earliest Hebrew literature. Briefly stated, their grounds for such a late date are as follows: (1) The date of Zoroaster is now generally fixed at 660-583 B. C.; and, since there is only a dialectic difference between the language of the Rig-Veda and that of the Avesta, there can be no great interval in time between the two works, the date of Zoroaster of course determining the date of the oldest part of the Avesta. (2) The change in language between the Rig-Veda and the Upanisads is not greater than that between Chaucer and Milton, and hence it is fair to suppose that about 200 years would suffice in the one case as well as in the other. (3) The Rishis who composed the hymns may very well have been in large measure contemporary one with another, and certain differences may be accounted for simply by variety of authorship. At the opposite pole from Hopkins and Jackson stand Tilak and Jacobi, who on the basis of astronomical calculations would carry the period of the composition of the Vedic hymns back beyond B. C. 2500 as far at least as to 3500 and according to Tilak even to 4500. The Tilak-Jacobi thesis has not met with favour at the hands of scholars, such as Weber, Whitney, Oldenberg, Thibaut, Hopkins and Macdonell. Apart from the assumed astronomical data, however, Jacobi urges that the norm of European progress cannot be applied to India on account of its isolated position and

[1] *India Old and New*, p. 30.

the consequent independent character of its development. And he emphasizes the fact that the dates assumed by himself for the Vedic period are not greater than are accepted by scholars for the civilization of the Euphrates and the Nile. Without endorsing the Tilak-Jacobi theory several scholars have on other grounds advocated an early date. Thus the late Professor Bühler was of the opinion that the conquest and brahmanization of India compells us to postulate a much earlier date for the beginning of the Vedic period than 1000 or 1200 B. C. Following him Winternitz[1] declares that from the standpoint of Indian history there is nothing against the view that Vedic literature goes back to the third millenium and the beginnings of Indian culture to the fourth millenium B. C. Professor Bloomfield, too, of Johns Hopkins has joined the ranks of those who are "now much more inclined to listen to an early date, say 2000 B. C., for the beginnings of Vedic literary production, and to a much earlier date for the beginnings of the institutions and religious concepts"[2] thereof. From these widely differing views of equally competent scholars it is clear that positive data are as yet lacking for determining the chronology of the Vedic period. The only formula which adequately describes the indefiniteness of the Vedic age is that suggested by Winternitz, namely $\times$ to about 500 B. C., the symbol $\times$ being the *terminus a quo*. Scholars who bring forward considerations based upon the length of time assumed to be necessary for a particular development, linguistic, literary, or historical, as the case may be, often forget that in literature and history as well as in religion one day may be as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day; that is, the literary and political development may at one time drag very slowly and at another time proceed with leaps and bounds. If the development of the invading Aryan tribes was rapid—and the development of an invading population is not unlikely to be rapid,—then a period of four hundred years might well suffice for the composition of the Vedic hymns and the spread of Vedic culture as assumed in the hypothesis of Hopkins and Jackson and exemplified in the development of the new world after its discovery in 1492. But if, on the contrary, the development was slow, then the period suggested by Bühler, Winternitz and Bloomfield may be none too large. What is needed to set all this uncertainty at rest is the discovery of *positive* data bearing upon the problem. Such data must clearly be *archaeological*. The Vedic Indians lived for centuries and possibly for milleniums in and about the Panjāb. They must have left archaeological remains of some sort, which are to be looked for at the bottom of the great mounds in the northern and eastern Panjāb. From 500 B. C. to 800 or 1000 B. C. there was more or less commercial intercourse between the Euphrates and the Indus. If the Vedic age was comparatively late, a lucky archaeological find may establish a synchronism. At any rate there is no need of becoming hopeless, so long as the mounds of the Panjāb are not attacked by the spade. Even as it is, the considerations adduced by Hopkins and Jackson are, in the opinion of the writer of this paper, so strong as to throw the burden of proof upon any one who

[1] *Geschichte der Indischen Litteratur*, 1904, S. 254.
[2] *The Religion of the Veda*, 1908, p. 20.

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defends an earlier date for the beginning of the Vedic age than 1500 or at the very outside 2000 B. C.

The Rig-Veda is the Vedic Book *par excellence.* Chronologically, as we have seen, it is the oldest book in Indian literature. Theoretically, it is the most sacred, as it heads the list of books which come under *sruti* or "revelation." The word *Veda,* which is cognate with the Greek *oida,* Latin *vid-eo,* German *weiss,* English *wit,* means wisdom or knowledge and Rig (Rik) is the name for laudatory verse or stanza. Hence the compound word *Rig-Veda* may be translated by "verse-wisdom." It is the earliest and most sacred wisdom of the Indian Aryans set forth in the form of verses or stanzas which are grouped in hymns. The unit of revelation, as in the *Quran,* seems to be the verse.

The Rig-Veda collection is only one among four collections. There is in addition the *Saman* or Chant-Veda, the *Yajus* or Veda of sacrificial formulas, and the *Atharvan* or Veda of "popular religion." The four Vedas are not unconnected with one another. Thus all the stanzas of the Sāma-Veda except seventy-five are found in the Rig-Veda. The Yajur-Veda and the Atharva-Veda also have a considerable amount of material in common with the Rig-Veda. What we really have, then, in the Four Vedas is the distribution of the original Vedic material into four *Sanhitas* or "Collections." The Four Vedas are a fourfold presentation of the primitive Veda, very much as the Four Gospels are a fourfold presentation of the primitive Gospel. By the "primitive Veda" of course is meant the poetic material of the Vedic age before it was collected. The poetic material existing in the various Vedic clans and priestly families consisted as the four historic collections show, of "a heterogeneous combination of old hymns, charms, philosophical poems, and popular songs, most, but not all of which are of religious content."[1] The motive which determined not only the composition of most of the Vedic hymns but also their collection and preservation was a *religious* one. Of the metrical stanzas in Vedic literature fully one half occur in the Rig-Veda. The Rig-Veda has furnished nearly all the stanzas for the Sāma-Veda, one-fourth of the matter for the Yajur-Veda, and a considerable part of the contents of the Atharva-Veda. The Rig-Veda, then, is a great documentary source for the other three Vedas, very much as the Gospel of Mark is a chief source for the Canonical Gospels, Matthew and Luke. Each of the four hymn-collections has its own elucidative literature in the form of *Brahmanas* which expound and develop the ritualistic element in the hymns, the *Upanisads* which do the same thing for the philosophical element, and the *Sutras* which are mnemonic compendia of the Vedic ritual and customary law. Thus by Veda in the narrow sense we mean the Rig-Veda; in a wider sense, the Four Vedas; and in the widest sense of all, the whole cycle of Vedic literature. The extent of the existing Vedic literature may be estimated from the fact that about one hundred and twenty texts have contributed to the Vedic Concordance of Professor Bloomfield. The Rig-Veda itself is about equal in bulk to the Iliad and Odyssey combined.

The Vedic Aryans, whose first and greatest literary monument is the

[1] *Hopkins, op. cit.,* p. 23.

Rig-Veda, appear in the Vedic age with their faces turned eastward. That is, they came from the west or north-west, entering India from without. The references to mountains and rivers found in the hymns show that the Vedic tribes occupied the northern and eastern parts of the Panjāb. The history of India is the history of the movement eastward and southward of the Aryan religion, language and culture, until the whole of India was more or less aryanized. That the Vedic tribes came from the west is proved not only from the fact that the Aryan line of march was from the west eastward, but also from the close connection which exists between the language and institutions of the Persian Aryans and the Indian Aryans. The Indo-Persian Aryans, as is well known, belonged, probably in blood and certainly in language, to the great Indo-European family. The contributions of the various groups within the Indo-European family have been diverse. The great contribution of Greece has been art; of Rome, law, and of the Teutonic world, liberty. While the most conspicuous contribution of both India and Persia has been *religion*. The Indo-Iranian peoples have furnished two national religions, Brahmanism and Zoroastrianism, and one international or "world" religion, Buddhism. Thus in the matter of religion Indian Aryan and Persian Aryan have been close competitors with Hebrew and Arab. And the continent which in these days is awakening out of sleep has been the mother of all the great historic religions of the world. The awakening of Asia ought to mean, in the long run, an awakening of that spiritual instinct, that religious creativeness, by which in the past the whole world has been enriched. The Vedic Aryans, who entered India sometime between 5000 B. C. and 1200 B. C. (probably nearer the later date than the earlier) were a manly race of shepherds and farmers who had a most healthy love of the good things of life. In their prayers to the gods as found in the Vedic hymns they asked for victory over enemies, long life, large families of sturdy sons, and plenty of cows. That their prayers sometimes took a higher flight will be illustrated later. It is sufficient to emphasize at this point that their desires were predominantly for very material and tangible good,—for food, and cows, and sons, and victory. In fact, the Aryan tribes when they invaded the Panjāb and laid the foundations of an Aryanized India were not at all unlike the Jutes and Angles and Saxons who invaded Britain and laid the foundations of the Anglo-Saxon world. Both groups of peoples were adventurous in spirit, ready for migration, and hard fighters. If the encounter between Anglo-Saxon and Briton meant war to the death, the encounter between *Aryan* and *Dasa* on the plains of the Panjāb meant also either death or slavery for the latter. And let us remember that the Aryan who invaded India and the Anglo-Saxon who invaded Britain were kinsmen, language-brothers certainly and probably blood-brothers. Wherever either of them went, he went to *rule*. We have already seen that the Vedic Aryans were cheery and optimistic, lovers of life and of the good things of life. One of the most striking contrasts in the history of thought is the contrast between the optimism of the Vedic age and the pessimism which gradually settled down like a pall upon the spirit of India and finally obtained its creedal statement in Buddha's doc-

trine of suffering. Certain other contrasts may also be specified. Earliest India, i. e., the India of the Rig-Veda, cherished the belief in personal existence after death, as e. g. in the "highest step" of Vishnu, the sun-home of the soul, a place symbolized by the sun in the zenith, where the sainted dead are happy by the side of Vishnu's "well of honey." But in later India, i. e. from the time of the Upanisads onward, transmigration is the dominant view in eschatology. Earlier India is without the ascetic ideal, so far as can be gathered from the Rig-Vedic hymns, its priests being frank and unabashed lovers of "*bakhshish*"; whereas for later India the religious ideal is that of renunciation, the ideal of the yellow robe and the begging bowl. But, as already stated, the greatest contrast between earliest India and later India is the contrast between optimism and pessimism. The Rig-Vedic age was an age of endeavour, an age of appreciation for the good things of life, and of longing for them. But ere long "the native hue of [Vedic] resolution was sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought." What it was that transformed Vedic optimism into the later Brahmanical and Buddhistic pessimism is not quite certain. Possibly Bloomfield is right in saying that "India herself, through her climate, her nature, and her economic conditions, furnishes reasonable ground for pessimism." [1] It must be admitted that the Vedic Aryans were able to live a long time in the Panjāb without becoming pessimists, centuries at the very least and possibly milleniums. It is a remarkable fact, too, that the present awakening in India is characterized by an optimistic appreciation of the good things of this life, such as education, representative government, religious reform, agricultural improvement, social welfare, good bank deposits, etc., etc., and by a strenuous endeavour to secure these things. In this respect Young India is clasping hands with the Old India of the Rig-Veda, and the emphasis is somewhat less upon other-worldliness than heretofore. Doubtless many things have contributed to bring about this awakening, e. g. the contact of the meditative Aryan of the East with the more practical Aryan of the West, the mingling and clashing of the religious ideals of India with those of Arabia and Palestine, and the splendid peace and security guaranteed to the whole of India by the British Government. It is true, India is so densely populated that the standard of living is very low. India is a land, too, of drought and famine, of plague and cholera, and of venomous snakes. And in addition, before the advent of the British Government, India was a land of chronic warfare and pillage. There was some ground for pessimism especially in the good old days. But great changes have taken place. War and pillage have ceased. Irrigation has increased the area of soil capable of cultivation. The enlargement of the railway system in India makes it now possible to send food rapidly into famine districts. The appliances of modern medical science are used against plague and cholera. Five Universities minister to the intellectual needs of the land. Thus life is becoming gradually a more tolerable thing in India. And as the cause of this the greatest agent on the material and intellectual side is the British Government. Studies in history, politics, and economics, have given to the young

[1] *Religion of the Veda,* p. 264.

men of India a larger outlook. The victory of little Japan over the giant of the North brought to India also a consciousness of power. In the light of these facts is it any wonder that the awakening of India is marked by an attitude of strenuous endeavour and of great hopefulness? Something of the buoyancy of the Vedic age is returning, its love of life and of life's good things and its readiness to strive for them. The pendulum is returning to where it was before. "The pale cast of thought" which has characterized India throughout the centuries is gradually giving way to India's primitive, "native" and Vedic "hue of *resolution*." This change represents one of the most outstanding results of the meeting of East and West. And what does it all mean except this that the strenuousness and love of life found reflected in the hymns of the Rig-Veda are more consonant with western ideals than with those hitherto associated with the meditative East.

It is to be hoped, however, that the process of the assimilation of East to West may not be carried too far. What a pity it would be, if the characteristic elements in the Indian consciousness, its sense of the unseen, its conviction of the supreme importance of the spiritual, its masterful repose, should ever go down in a mad rush after material ends. What a pity it would be if India should ever forget a truth once voiced by a man of Asiatic birth: "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."[1] The Indian type of consciousness is, as it were, a tropical plant trained up in the age long isolation of India, the product of all the influences, climatic, geographic, ethnological and historical, which have played upon India from the beginning. Whatever contribution India has made to the world's good in the past has been along the line of her own specific endowment. So will it be in the future. Whatever may be the permanent value of the metaphysical conclusions to which the sages of ancient India attained, the type and attitude of mind which formulated the conclusions is, in the opinion of the writer of this paper, even more valuable than the conclusions formulated. The writer of this paper, a Christian missionary in India, is looking for a great contribution from this same Indian consciousness, to help solve the problems of Christian interpretation, thought, and life. It may be said that part of India's contribution has already been made, and there is truth in this. The doctrine of the divine immanence, in however exaggerated a form it has been held in India, has helped to correct the deistic tendency toward an exaggerated transcendence. And the doctrine of *Karma*, namely that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" deserves a larger development in Christian theology than it has yet received.

There is no great fear that the best elements in the Indian consciousness will ever be lost. The forces which helped to mould and fashion this particular type of mind are also present to conserve it. During the process of awakening now going on in India the pendulum will undoubtedly swing for a time toward the material and the secular. This will mean simply that India has discovered that "the life that now is" has its rights as well as "the life that is to come." But more than this, India's thought can

[1] *Luke* xii. 15.

never influence the world as it should, until there has been a *Purgatio intellectus*, a purging of the understanding. What better calculated to give poise and sanity to India's thought than just the attempt to understand "the life that now is" through the study of the empirical sciences of this present life such as physics, chemistry, biology, history, economics, psychology, etc., studies enthusiastically pursued by multitudes of young men in the Indian Universities at the present time. When through the intelligence and effort and sacrifice of the people of India life in that land becomes a more tolerable thing and the hitherto-existing grounds of pessimism have been largely removed, when "the life that now is" is valued at its true worth, whether found in Brahman or woman or pariah, then the conclusions of the thinkers of India on the problems of "the life to come" will carry still greater weight. And the interesting thing is, in this connection, that the growing appreciation of the value of the present life, now observable in India, marks a kind of return to the spirit of the Rig-Veda, even as the spirit of the Vedic Aryan was in many respects akin to the spirit of the Anglo-Saxon. Without such a return to the spirit of the Rig-Veda India would be faithless to one part of her ancient heritage. It is one of the great merits of the British administration in India that it has helped the people of India to rediscover a highly important, but almost forgotten, part of their spiritual inheritance.

II. THE GOD VARUNA.

In the second part of this paper I hope to be as concrete as in the first part I have been abstract. To this end we shall begin with the most notable group of Varuna hymns found in the Rig-Veda, namely hymns 86-89 of book seven. The Rig-Veda is divided into ten *mandalas* or books. Of these the central nucleus and probably earliest portion is made up of books two to seven inclusive, the so-called "family books," each of these books being assigned by tradition to a definite, priestly family. Book seven, then, is the last of the family books. Without further preliminaries let us plunge *in medias res*. We shall begin with Rig-Veda vii, 86, of which a metrical translation is herewith subjoined.

1. Wise is the world's creation through the greatness
   Of him who fixed the earth and sky asunder,
   And lifted up the spacious vault of heaven
   Studded with stars, and earth beneath extended.

2. With mine own heart I meditate this question:
   "With Varuna when shall I be united?
   What gift of mine will he unangered welcome?
   When shall I happy-hearted see his mercy?"

3. Wishing to know my sin I make inquiry,
   I go about to all the wise and ask them;
   With one accord they gave to me this answer:
   " 'Tis Varuna, whose wrath is hot against thee."

4. O Varuna, what was my chief transgression,
   That thou would'st slay a friend who sings thy praises?

Tell me, god undeceivable and sovereign,
That sinless I may quickly give thee homage.

5. Release from us the wrongs our sires committed,
As well as those committed by our own selves;
As a cow-thief, O King, (unties) a young calf,
So set thou free Vasistha from the fetter.

6. 'Twas not my will, O Varuna, 'twas delusion,
Wine, anger, dice, or lack of thought, that caused it;
Old age participates in offences youthful,
Sleep even is a cause of sinful doings.

7. Slave-like will I, when once my sin is pardoned,
Serve him the merciful, erewhile the angry;
The kindly lord gives wisdom to the simple,
And leads the wise to riches, he a wiser.

8. May this my praise-song, Varuna, Sovereign ruler,
Speak to thy heart and make thee all-complaisant;
May it be well with us in rest and labour,
Ye gods, protect us evermore with blessings.

A few words with reference to metre and poetical form. "The units of Vedic metre are the verse, the stanza and the hymn."[1] The word for verse is *pada* or "foot," not foot in the modern sense of poetic measure, but in the sense of verse-line. Thus the first "foot" of the hymn given above is the line, "Wise is the world's creation through the greatness." The name *pada* "foot" was given to such a line of poetry, apparently because most stanzas have four lines just as cows have four feet, and so the word "foot" seemed an appropriate name for one quarter of the verse-cow. We shall see, however, that some verse-cows have to hobble on three feet, even as real cows sometimes have to do when they are lame. One must early get accustomed to the bucolic imagery of the Rig-Veda. We have an example of it in this very hymn in the following passage (translated however not quite literally):

"As a cow-thief, O King, (unties) a young calf
So set thou free Vasistha from the fetter."

The first four lines of the hymn constitute the first stanza or Rig (ric):

"Wise is the world's creation through the greatness
Of him who fixed the earth and sky asunder,
And lifted up the spacious vault of heaven,
Studded with stars, and earth beneath extended."

A group of stanzas constitutes a hymn. In the present hymn there are eight stanzas. It is composed in the tristubh metre, the most commonly used metre in the whole Rig-Veda. The tristubh stanza consists of four eleven-syllable lines. The first line of this hymn reads thus in Vedic: *Dhira tu asya mahina janunsi* |, the translation into English being "Wise is the world's creation through the greatness." This is very much like

[1] Arnold, *Vedic Metre*, p. 7.

Chaucer's ten-syllable line with the added eleventh syllable, e. g. "When that Aprille with his showres swoote." The Vedic hymns have a pitch or musical accent, very much like that in Greek.

Coming now to the religious content of this hymn we notice that it contains references to the two things which filled the mind of Kant with awe, namely the starry heaven above and the moral law within. Varuna is the creator of heaven and earth. He fixed the earth and sky asunder, lifting up the spacious vault of heaven and spreading the earth out beneath. The greatness of Varuna is revealed in creation. The first verse of vii. 86 is the Vedic counterpart of Psalm xix. 1: "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork." Varuna is an absolute sovereign and king. Throughout the Rig-Veda as a whole "the attribute of sovereignty is in a predominant manner appropriated to Varuna." [1] So much for "the starry heavens above" and the attributes of Varuna as creator and sovereign. There remains "the moral law within," the attitude of Varuna toward moral evil, and the attitude of the sinner toward Varuna. The priestly singer Vasistha, to whom the great majority of the hymns of the seventh book are ascribed by tradition (and possibly with correctness in some cases including the present) was a kind of Vedic analogue of David "the sweet singer of Israel." He comes before us in the second, third and fourth stanzas of our hymn in an introspective and troubled attitude, wondering what sin he has committed, asking the wise for their opinion, and finally making a direct appeal to Varuna. Let us repeat the three stanzas:

2. With mine own heart I meditate this question:
"With Varuna when shall I be united?
What gift of mine will he unangered welcome?
When shall I happy-hearted see his mercy?"

3. Wishing to know my sin I make inquiry,
I go about to all the wise and ask them;
With one accord they gave to me this answer,
"'Tis Varuna, whose wrath is hot against thee."

4. O Varuna, what was my chief transgression,
That thou wouldst slay a friend that sings thy praises?
Tell me, god undeceivable and sovereign,
That sinless I may quickly give thee homage.

The question of the Vedic singer is twofold; first, "What sin have I committed?", and secondly, "How am I to be at one again with Varuna who takes account of sin?" The Vedic singer's experience is like that of Job. He has been brought nigh to death through illness or other calamity. Varuna apparently wishes to slay him. He is made uneasy about himself. He asks his friends. They say that Varuna is angry with him. So said Job's friends. The Vedic singer prays to Varuna to tell him his transgression, especially his chief transgression. Note here as in early Hebraism the vital connection assumed to exist between *suffering* and *sin*. The Vedic poet is a *sufferer*. Therefore as his friends say and as he himself

[1] Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, p. 24.

admits, he is a *sinner*. In stanza fifth there is the prayer for forgiveness:

> Release from us the wrongs our sires committed,
> As well as those committed by our own selves;
> As a cow-thief, O King, [unties] a young calf,
> So set thou free Vasistha from the fetter.

Here a certain *solidarity* in sin is recognized as between the fathers and their children. It is a conception which belongs to a primitive tribal state of society, where the unit of responsibility is the family or tribe rather than the individual. It reminds us of the phrase in Ex. xx. 5, "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children," and the confession in Ps. li. 5, "Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." The "fetter" referred to in the fourth line of the fifth stanza is doubtless the fetter of illness, disaster, or imminent death. The sixth stanza is remarkable because of its ethical content and because of the plea of human infirmity which it presents as an excuse for sin.

> 'T was not my will, O Varuna, 't was delusion,
> Wine, anger, dice, or lack of thought, that caused it;
> Old age participates in offences youthful,
> Sleep even is a cause of sinful doings.

Another way of saying that "to err is human" even in old age and in sleep. The poet says in effect: "I did not mean to commit sin. It was infatuation, wine, anger, dice, thoughtlessness, that did it." It reminds us of Paul's saying in Rom. vii. 20: "If what I would not, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me." At any rate, we have here an impressive list of roots of sin in the Vedic age, drink, gambling, loss of temper, and thoughtlessness.

The seventh verse expresses the poet's determination to serve Varuna like a slave, when once his sin has been forgiven.

> Slave-like will I, when once my sin is pardoned,
> Serve him the merciful, erewhile the angry.

The word *dasa* "slave" is worth noticing. The Dasyus or Dāsas were the aborigines who met the invading Aryans in deadly conflict and were either killed or reduced to slavery. Hence very naturally the word for slave was *dasa*, a member of the Dāsa race, just as our word "slave" meant originally a member of the Slavonic race. The poet in effect says: "I will be just as much a bond-slave to Varuna, when once he has delivered me from the "fetter" or penalty of sin, as any *Dasa* is slave to an Aryan. Again we are reminded of Paul's words of devotion and thankful love: "Paul, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ . . . . who loved me and gave himself up for me." [1] But Varuna not only forgives sin, but also gives wisdom to the simple, i. e. enables them to learn wisdom through experience of the fetters of sin; and then he restores worldly prosperity.

> The kindly lord gives wisdom to the simple,
> And leads the wise to riches, he a wiser.

This also reminds us of two Biblical passages, Ps. xix. 7, "The testimony

[1] *Rom.* i. 1; *Gal.* ii. 21.

of Jehovah is sure, *making wise the simple,*" and James i. 5, "If any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God."

The eighth and last stanza is somewhat general in its nature and looks like an editorial addition:

> May this my praise-song, Varuna, sovereign ruler,
> Speak to thy heart and make thee all-complaisant;
> May it be well with us in rest and labour,
> Ye gods, protect us evermore with blessings.

So the nineteenth Psalm ends: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Jehovah, my rock and my redeemer." The last line however introduces a polytheistic note "Ye Gods," whereas the rest of the hymn has been monolatrous or even monotheistic in tone. Since the last line stands at the end of a considerable number of other hymns in the seventh book, many of which are not addressed to Varuna, it at least must be taken as the work of an editor.

According to this hymn Varuna's attributes are wisdom, greatness, creative power, sovereignty, holiness (manifesting itself in wrath on account of sin), and mercy, when the sinner is penitent. Thus both the natural and the moral attributes are well represented. The consciousness of sin on the part of the stricken poet is very real, although perhaps not the profoundest possible. It is not so much the defilement of sin as the suffering involved, that engages the poet's thought. But even so it is an impressive illustration of the fact that one great mission of suffering is to make people more than usually sensitive to moral distinctions. Certainly the poet was thus sensitive, and he pours out his soul before Varuna quite in the spirit of the choicest penitential Psalms of the Old Testament. There is also a beautiful recognition on the part of the Vedic seer that Varuna's great gift of forgiveness calls for full surrender and grateful service.

In this study of the theology of a single Vedic hymn you will be able to check my conclusions, so far as the translation which has been presented is correct. I am indebted to Griffith's translation for a few phrases both in this hymn and in the following hymns translated. There are some uncertainties in this hymn, but nothing that can seriously affect its interpretation. To illustrate the uncertainty which attaches to the translation of the first line of the hymn, several alternative renderings of it are here given:—

> Replete with might and wisdom is his nature—(Grassmann).
> Wise are the generations through his greatness—(Ludwig).
> His works bear witness to his might and wisdom—(Kaegi).
> Wise verily are creatures through his greatness—(Griffith).
> Wise, truly, and great is his own nature—(Bloomfield).
> All creatures through his might have their existence—(Geldner).
> Wise is the world's creation through his greatness.

The experience of the seer Vasistha will now be studied in another hymn.

RV. vii. 88. *To Varuna.*

1. Present a praise-song beautiful, most pleasing,
Vasistha, to King Varuna the gracious,
Who forward leads to us the Bull exalted,
The worshipful, and having thousand treasures.

2. Now that at last I have come near and seen him,
The face of Varuna seems like that of Agni;
May the lord bring in heaven a wondrous vision
For me to see, be it of light or darkness.

3. When Varuna and I take ship together,
And forward steer our vessel to mid-ocean,
When on the summits of the waves we travel,
In ocean's swing may we swing on to glory.

4. Varuna took on board with him Vasistha,
Made him a Rishi by his might and working,
A poet singer on a day auspicious,
When skies and dawns stretched themselves out [unclouded].

5. What has become of this our ancient friendship,
When without enmity we walked together;
And I, Varuna, to thy lofty castle,
Thy thousand-gated dwelling, had admittance?

6. If, Varuna, a dear friend and companion,
Such as I am of thine, have sinned against thee,
May we not eat the fruit of our own doings,
As sage grant shelter to the one who lauds thee.

7. While we abide in these firm habitations,
And from the lap of Aditi gain favour,
May Varuna remove from us the fetter,
Ye gods, protect us evermore with blessings.

This hymn contains a retrospect. The sage Vasistha recalls his former friendship and intimacy with Varuna and how in a time of special communion Varuna had made him a Rishi or prophet. The time of Vasistha's prophetic call was a time of vision, when he saw the face of Varuna as if at had been the face of Agni (Fire), and a time of intimacy, when Varuna and he took ship together and went out alone into the mid-stream. We may compare with this Isaiah's vision and call. The hymn contains two pictures of the intimacy which Vasistha enjoyed with Varuna, (a) when he was in a boat at sea alone with Varuna, and (b) when as the guest of Varuna he had free access to his thousand-portaled house. But alas! this intimacy was broken through sin, and so there is prayer for forgiveness:

If, Varuna, a dear friend and companion,
Such as I am of thine, have sinned against thee,
May I not eat the fruit of my own doings,
As sage grant shelter to the one who lauds thee.

The emphasis here also rests upon deliverance from *penalty*. "May we not as sinners against thee eat the fruit of sin" (v. 6). "May Varuna remove from us the fetter" (v. 7).

As regards his cosmic activities and nature, Varuna leads out the lofty *bull* (or strong one), a name for the sun. Compare Ps. xix. 5, where the sun "rejoiceth as a *strong man* to run his course." His face is like that of fire. He brings forth the bright light of day and the dim light of night (v. 2). "Varuna is the lord of light by day and by night."[1] From these passages and others we might infer that Varuna is, as it were, the Light of light, the god whose special manifestation is light, be it the light of sun, or moon, or star. And from this point of view the Sun rising in the morning might be regarded at once as "the sent" of Varuna and as the revelation of the glory of the Sender.

We now pass on to hymn eighty-nine, which perhaps throws some light on the nature of Vasistha's suffering.

RV. vii. 89. *To Varuna.*

1. I do not wish, King Varuna,
   To go down to the house of clay,
   O Lord, have mercy and forgive.

2. When tottering I move about,
   O slinger, like a bag puffed up,
   O lord, have mercy and forgive.

3. Somehow through lack of insight I
   Have gone astray, O shining one,
   O lord, have mercy and forgive.

4. Thirst finds thy worshipper even when
   He in the midst of water stands,
   O lord, have mercy and forgive.

5. Whatever wrong against the race of gods we do,
   Being but men, O Varuna, whatever law
   Of thine we may have brok'n in thoughtlessness,
   For that transgression do not punish us, O God.

This hymn is a kind of Vedic litany with a regular refrain, "O Lord, have mercy, and forgive." The poet is sick and in fear of death. He totters about like a bag puffed up. Tantalus-like he is afflicted by thirst even in the midst of waters. Most commentators think that it was dropsy, from which the poet was suffering. Dropsy, a water-disease, was regarded as the peculiar infliction of Varuna, who was also a water-god, as we shall see. The poet does not want to go down to "the house of clay" (reference to burial?), and so he makes a reiterated plea for mercy and forgiveness, meaning thereby restoration to health and extension of life. "The life that now is" was a very dear thing even to the Vedic seer. The poet's suffering is apparently the source of the conviction that he has gone astray, or perhaps better the cause of the insight which makes his sin against Varuna clear to him. Here, too, we have certain excuses for sin. It is due

[1] Macdonell, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

to "lack of insight" and thoughtlessness, and it is a very human thing for men to sin "being but men."

You have doubtless noticed the change of metre in this hymn. It is the *Gayatri* measure, the first four stanzas consisting of three eight-syllable lines each, somewhat after the style of the iambic tetrametre. Here the verse-cow has to get on with three feet, since the stanza has only three lines. But the fifth and last stanza is in a different metre, the *Jagati*, and consists of four twelve-syllable lines, each of which approximates to the iambic hexametre or Alexandrine. The last stanza is clearly a later addition. It differs both in metre and in point of view from the preceding stanzas. Stanzas 1-4 are intensely personal and have a monotheistic ring, whereas the fifth stanza speaks of sin as committed against "the race of gods." So much for the three hymns which seem to tell the story of Vasistha's sin and suffering, namely vii. 86, 88 and 89. There still remains hymn 87, in order to complete the group in the seventh book.

RV. vii. 87. *To Varuna.*

1. Varuna hath cut for the sun a pathway,
   And caused the water-floods to hasten seaward;
   Dug for the shining days their mighty channels,
   Guiding them as a racer guides his horses.

2. Thy breath, the wind, resoundeth through the mid-air,
   Like eager cattle in the pasture feeding;
   Whate'er broad earth contains and the high heavens,
   All that, Varuna, is thy dear dominion.

3. The spies of Varuna, sent forth on his errands,
   Watch on all sides the two worlds well-established;
   Righteous are they, wise, knowing sacrifices,
   Inspirers, too, of prayer in hearts of wisdom.

4. Said Varuna to me his priestly singer:
   "The names borne by the cow are three times seven";
   The wise who know the secret of this saying,
   Must not proclaim it to the ages after.

5. Three heavens are comprehended in his greatness,
   Three earths beneath, in order six divisions;
   And sovereign Varuna the wise created
   The golden swing, that it might shine in heaven.

6. As heaven, god Varuna sank into the Sindhu,
   Like a white drop the mighty beast descended,
   Ruling in depths and measurer of the mid-air,
   The King of all that is, whose sway is boundless.

7. Who showeth mercy even to the sinner,
   O that we might in Varuna's eyes be guiltless,
   The laws of Aditi fulfilling truly;
   Ye gods, protect us evermore with blessings.

Varuna comes before us in the first stanza as a great *road-maker*. He

cut a path for the sun, for the rivers as they flow toward the sea, and for the days. The wind is his breath (v. 2). Like an earthly potentate he has his spies, who are constantly on tour through heaven and earth, watching to see if their master's will is obeyed (v. 3). What are these "spies"? Do they perform such functions of espionage and accusation as were apparently assigned to the Satan in the book of Job? Are they to be thought of as the sainted Fathers, or the stars, or the rays of light? They are described in the hymn before us as seers, righteous, skilled in sacrifice, and the inspirers of devotion in the wise. A physical basis for the spies of Varuna might perhaps be found in the rays of the morning sun, which with undeviating regularity arouse the pious to sacrifice and prayer. We may compare Milton's lines:

> "*Ere the blabbing eastern scout,*
> The nice Morn on the Indian steep,
> From the cabined loop-hole peep,
> And to the tell-tale Sun descry
> Our concealed solemnity."—Comus, 138-142.

Here "the nice Morn," constituted by the rays of the not yet risen Sun, is represented as making a report to the Sun.

The Sun in stanza five is called a "golden swing" (cp. hymn 88, 3), which Varuna in his wisdom made to shine in the sky. Varuna is not to be identified with the sun, since in stanzas one and five he is expressly distinguished from the sun as the one who placed the sun's golden swing in heaven and hollowed out a path for it. According to stanza six, Varuna like *Dyaus* (heaven) sinks into the *Sindhu.* This verse presupposes some place on the Indus where sky and water meet, and where the light-bearers (sun, moon, and stars) as revelations of Varuna seem to sink into the sea-like bosom of the great river. Varuna as represented by the sun is compared, when he sinks into the sea, with a white drop (or spark) and with a mighty beast. (cp. the Bull in vii. 88, 1).

There are in this hymn two references to Varuna's connection with water. He causes the water-floods to hasten seaward (v. 1), and he himself in the form of sky or sun sinks into the Sindhu (v. 6). In the other three Vasistha-hymns to Varuna there are also two references,—in vii. 88, 3-4, where Varuna takes Vasistha out to one of his own realms, the sea, and again in vii. 89, 4, according to which thirst attacks Varuna's worshipper even when he stands in the midst of waters.

According to stanza five the three heavens and the three earths, i. e. the heavens and the earth in all their fulness and compass, are deposited in Varuna. This reminds us of the Biblical passages, "In Him all things consist" (Col. i. 17), and "Heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee" (I Kings viii. 27). Varuna cannot be identified with the heaven, for the three heavens are in him. A magnificent statement of the *transcendence* of Varuna. He is the Container, not the contained.

In this hymn also Varuna is at once sovereign and gracious. As sovereign he is the King of all that is. All things in heaven and earth come under his dominion. As King he placed the "golden swing" of the sun in the sky. As the gracious one Varuna showeth mercy even to him who has

committed sin. Immediately after this there is voiced one of the most ethical and spiritual aspirations to be found in the Rig-Veda (even though it be the work of an editor):

O that we might in Varuna's eyes be guiltless,
The laws of Aditi fulfilling truly.

In these four Vasistha-hymns which we have studied Varuna is apparently the Lord of light. His face is as the face of fire. He is a shining one. He makes the sun to rise, leading him forth like a strong bull, and preparing a pathway for him; or (the figure being changed) he makes the sun to swing from east to west like a golden swing in the sky. It is he who gives both the bright light of day and the dim light (= darkness) of night. Certain Biblical parallels may be cited: "Thou hast prepared luminary and sun" (Ps. lxxiv. 16); "He (your Father in heaven) maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good" (Matt. v. 45); "God is light" (I John i. 5). Equally, then, in First John, and in these four Vasistha hymns, it is the God who is *light* that takes account of sin.

The next Vedic scripture to be examined by us will be a part of the twenty-fourth hymn of the first book.

RV. I. 24, 6-15. *To Varuna.*

6. Thy realm, O Varuna, thy might, and spirit,
Even these winged birds have not attained to,
Nor yet the waters that go on forever,
Nor those whose strength abates the wind's wild fury.

7. In baseless space King Varuna the holy
Sustains erect the summit of a great tree;
Its rays whose root is high above stream downward,
Within us may they hide themselves completely.

8. King Varuna hath made a spacious pathway,
Wherein the sun may travel on his journey;
Created feet to walk with for the footless,
And by his ban removed heart-piercing troubles.

9. A hundred are thy remedies, a thousand,
Wide be thy grace and deep, O sovereign ruler;
Drive far away from us death and destruction,
And make us free from ev'n the sin committed.

10. The stars which show themselves by night in heaven
Placed high above,—where are they gone by daylight?
Varuna's regulations are unbroken,
And through the night the moon wide-gleaming wanders.

11. This I implore of thee with prayer adoring,
Thy suppliant asks this with his oblation:
O Varuna, stay here with us unangered,
Far-famed one, of life do not deprive us.

12. By night and day this very thing they tell me,
My heart's own craving voices, too, the same wish:

He whom the captured Sunahsepa cried to,
The same King Varuna, may he release us.

13. For Sunahsepa cried to the Aditya,
When captured he was fastened to three pillars:
May Varuna, the King, set free this captive,
Wise and inerrant may he loose my fetters.

14. O Varuna, we turn aside thine anger
By prayers and sacrifices and oblations,
Sage *Asura*, thou sovereign widely ruling,
Release from us the sins we have committed.

15. O Varuna, release from us the fetter,
The upper and the lower and the middle;
So may we in thy governance, Aditya,
Belong to Aditi, when once made guiltless.

In the first stanza translated Varuna's *separateness* is emphasized. His realm is "beyond the flight of birds," beyond the utmost surge of the waters, and beyond the farthest reach of the wind-breaking mountains. In this hymn not only the sun, but also the moon and the stars are mentioned. The sun is conceived under two new metaphors, first as a *tree* upheld by Varuna in the baseless heart of space, whose root is above and whose branches as rays stretch downward; and, secondly, as the *footless* one, for whom Varuna not only made a broad path but also provided feet. The tenth stanza brings Varuna into connection with the night, the moon, and the stars. It reminds us that in the post-Vedic interpretation of the dual divinities Mitra-Varuna, Mitra was taken as day and Varuna as night. And the reference to the moon wide-gleaming and wandering through the night also reminds us that Oldenberg and Hillebrandt, the two great German authorities on Vedic mythology, both connect Varuna originally with the moon. In this hymn, however, nothing more is said than that the movements of the sun, moon, and stars are in accordance with the "regulations" of Varuna. The word for stars or constellations means literally "bears," bears of the sky, with which may be compared the sun as the "bull" or "mighty beast" of the sky.

As regards the sovereignty of Varuna, it is highly exalted beyond all that is earthly. He is King and "mysterious lord" (*Asura*=Persian *Ahura*), the epithet Asura being specially applicable to Varuna in the Rig-Veda.

The grace of Varuna is magnified in this hymn. His good will or kindly thought (*sumati*) is wide and deep, and he has a hundred, nay a thousand remedies. Death is the "fetter" with which Varuna binds those who break his ordinances. Compare "The *wages* of sin is death" (Rom. vi. 23). But his "free gift" is life, since he has a multitude of remedies. And so he is besought to drive away death, that is in other words to release from sin. The point of view is the same as in the four Vasistha hymns already studied. That which is emphasized in sin is what it entails of suffering and death. It is the same thought as underlay the disciples' question: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he

should be born blind?" (John ix. 2). This conception of the close relation between sin and suffering, the sinner being ever bound by the cords of suffering, while already clearly taught in the Rig-Veda, was destined to receive its full development in that which is the distinctive ethical philosophy of India, the doctrine of *Karma*. With this difference, however, that whereas in the Rig-Veda the suffering which is the fruit of sin is experienced in this life in the form of illness and death, in the later doctrine as found in the Upanisads it is experienced not only in this life, but especially in the life to come in the form of the type of being into which the sinner will suffer re-incarnation. In this hymn and throughout the Rig-Veda the *grace* of God receives a fair emphasis. In the later doctrine the grace of God is thrust more or less into the background by the automatic working of *Karma* as the great principle of retribution.

We have in this hymn a very explicit statement of the way in which the anger of Varuna may be deprecated or appeased. It is "by prayers and sacrifices and oblations," in other words through the machinery of the ritual. We need not deny all ethical and spiritual efficacy to the ritualistic performances of the Vedic Aryans any more than to the Hebrews, since among both peoples the worshipper along with the ritually appointed offering may also have brought the sacrifice of "a broken and contrite heart." Nevertheless, we can detect even in the Rig-Veda the beginnings of a tendency to exalt overmuch both the ritual and those in charge of the ritual. The result of which was that the various spiritual benefits supposed to be mediated through the ritual such as forgiveness, etc., gradually became a monopoly in the hands of the priests. We shall now pass on to the next hymn.

RV. I. 25. *To Varuna.*

I. 1. However much, god Varuna,
We violate thine ordinance,
Being but mortals, day by day;

2. Yet give us not up to the stroke
Death-dealing of the angry one,
The wrath of the incensed one.

3. As one unbinds a tethered steed,
So loosen we with songs of praise
Thy heart, O Varuna, for grace.

4. Forth do my aspirations fly
[To thee, O god,] in search of good,
Ev'n as the birds unto their nests.

5. O when shall we bring near to us,
For grace, the wide-eyed Varuna,
Hero, whom sovereignty adorns?

II. 7. Who knows the path of birds that through
The atmosphere do wing their flight,
And ocean-dwelling knows the ships;

8. Who knows as one whose law is firm

The twelve moons rich in progeny,
Who knows the moon of later birth;

9. Who knows the pathway of the wind,
The wide, the high, the mighty wind,
And those that sit above [the wind].

10. Enthroned within his palace sits
God Varuna whose law is firm,
The very wise for sovereignty.

11. From there all-seeing Varuna
The secret things of earth beholds,
Things done and things yet to be done.

III. 12. May he the all-wise Aditya
Make all our days fair-pathed for us,
May he prolong our lives for us.

13. Wearing a golden mantle, clothed
In shining garb, is Varuna;
His spies are seated round about.

14. He whom deceivers do not dare
Try to deceive nor injurers
To harm, nor th' hostile to defy.

15. And who wins fame among mankind,
Fame all complete, yea winneth fame
Amongst ourselves by giving food.

16. Forth do my thoughts go unto him,
Like cows unto the pasture-fields,
Seeking to find the wide-eyed god.

IV. 17. Let us two speak together now,
Since the dear honey-sacrifice
Priest-like thou eatest, brought by me.

18. O may I see upon the earth
Varuna's car all-visible;
May he accept this song of mine.

19. Hear this my cry, O Varuna,
Be gracious unto me today,
Longing for help I yearn for thee.

20. Wise one, thou rulest over all,
O'er heaven and earth thou bearest sway,
So hear me as I make my plea.

21. Unbind for us the highest bond,
The middle one untie for us,
The lowest, too, that we may live.

We follow Delbrück in dividing this hymn into four strophes containing five stanzas each, stanza six being rejected as an interpolation. This is one of the most remarkable of the Varuna hymns. Varuna is repre-

sented as seated upon his heavenly throne in the place and attitude of sovereignty. From his palace where he is arrayed in the garments of royalty, and where he is surrounded by his court officials, the "spies,"[1] he looks forth upon the earth. His omniscience is emphasized. He beholds the secret things of earth and knows the things that will be done as well as the things that have been done. He knows the path of birds (cp. Bryant's *Ode to a Waterfowl*), the [course of] ships by sea, the [way of] the twelve moons, and the pathway of the wind. There seems to be here a pregnant use of the word "know" in the sense of governance, direction, approbation, somewhat as in Hebrew. Compare "Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous" (Ps. i. 6).

Varuna has the epithet *dhritavrata* "he whose law is fixed" (vv. 8, 10). No one can resist his sovereign will or violate his law with impunity. He rules over all, bearing sway in heaven and on earth. "Sin is the transgression of the law" of Varuna (v. 1), and he is angry when his ordinances are violated. As a punishment Varuna fastens upon the sinner the fetter of death (vv. 2, 12, 21). Varuna is also a god of *grace*. Though men violate his ordinances daily through human infirmity, yet when they confess their sin (v. 1) and offer the spiritual sacrifices of prayer, devout thought and aspiration, and praise, at the same time bringing the ritually appointed offering (v. 17), then Varuna hears (vv. 19, 20) and is gracious (vv. 3, 5). He unbinds the threefold cord of death (v. 21), prolongs life (v. 12), and makes the days fair-pathed for men. He restores his fellowship, speaks again with his worshipper, and reveals himself in his chariot on the earth. Thus Varuna comes before us in this hymn clothed with the most exalted attributes. He is the Lord of life and death (vv. 2, 12, 21), the Lord of the past and the future (v. 11), and the King of heaven and earth (v. 20). He punishes sin, and forgives the penitent sinner. Verily this hymn is "holy ground."

The epithel *urucaksas* "wide-eyed" (or "far-seeing") refers to Varuna as the god whose eye is the *sun*. Here again Varuna seems to be the lord of light, whose best manifestation is the light of the sun.

The anthropomorphism of Varuna's personality is well developed in this hymn. He eats (v. 17), sits (v. 10), wears a mantle and a shining robe (v. 13), sees (vv. 5, 11), hears (vv. 19, 20), knows (vv. 7-9), rides in a chariot (v. 18), and has anger and wrath (v. 2) as well as mercy (vv. 3, 5).

Two stanzas of this hymn are notable both for the beauty of the similes which they contain and for their expression of aspiration:

4. Forth do my aspirations (?) fly
   [To thee, O god] in search of good,
   Ev'n as the birds unto their nests; and

16. Forth do my thoughts go unto him,
   Like cows unto the pasture-fields,
   Seeking to find the wide-eyed god.

The next hymn to be translated is the eighty-fifth hymn of the fifth

[1] Compare Sanday's Sermon on Angels in *The Life of Christ in Recent Research.* pp. 315-324.

book, the only hymn in that book addressed to Varuna alone.

RV. V. 85. *To Varuna.*

I. 1. To sovereign Varuna let me sing a praise-song,
In lofty tones and deep, to him well-pleasing,
Far-faméd one, who hath spread the earth out sunward,
Ev'n as a priest spreads out the skin of slain beast.

2. Air hath Varuna placed within the tree-tops,
Milk in the cows and strength in the swift horses,
Wisdom in hearts and fire within the waters,
In heaven the sun and soma on the mountain.

II. 3. Now hath Varuna turned the cask face downwards,
And let it flow through heav'n and earth and mid-air;
Therewith the King of all the world doth moisten
The ground, ev'n as the rain the fields of barley.

4. What time Varuna longeth for the cloud-milk,
He moisteneth the ground, yea earth and heaven;
The mountains clothe themselves then in the rain-cloud,
And the storm-heroes fierce abate their fury.

III. 5. Let me declare this mighty deed of magic
Of Varuna the glorious and the godlike,
Who standing in the air's mid-region meted
The earth out with the sun as with a measure.

6. This, too, is the all-wise god's deed of magic
A mighty deed, which none hath ever hindered,
That all the streams which pour themselves out swiftly,
Do never with their floods fill up the one sea.

IV. 7. Whatever sin against friend or companion,
We have committed or against a brother,
Against one's kinsman or against a stranger,—
O Varuna, do thou forgive us all that.

8. If we have cheated at the dice when playing,
If witting or unwitting we have done wrong,
Cast all those sins away like loosened fetters,
And thy dear worshippers may we again be.

This hymn divides itself into four strophes of two stanzas each. According to the first strophe all the best things are the handiwork of Varuna, e. g. air in the forests, milk in the cows, strength in horses, intellect in hearts, fire in waters, sun in heaven, and soma in mountains. Varuna spread the earth out in the sunlight just as a sacrificial priest spreads out the skin of a beast—an interesting reference to animal sacrifice. In the second strophe Varuna comes before us in a new character, that of a rain-god. He turns the cloud-cask upside down and causes its water to flow. The rain is the milk of the clouds. With the rain Varuna wets the ground. In this weather-drama Varuna is apparently assisted by the *Maruts* or storm-winds. The third strophe also brings to us a new aspect

of Varuna, that of his occult or magic power (*maya*). It is the same word as in the later philosophy of India stands over against *Brahma* as its antithesis. Two illustrations of the occult power of Varuna who has the attributes of an *Asura* or "mysterious being" are cited. Standing in the mid-air he measures the earth with the sun as with a measure. And, secondly, the downflowing streams sent by Varuna never fill the one sea. The fourth strophe is important ethically. It contains an acknowledgement that sin may be committed not only against a brother tribesman, but also against a *stranger*, the man of another tribe. This is ethically very advanced. There is also the recognition of the fact that only as forgiven by Varuna can those who have violated his ordinances, again become his acceptable worshippers.

In this hymn Varuna's magic power or power of effecting magic transportations is celebrated. He "maketh his sun to rise" (vv. 1, 2, 5) and he "sendeth rain" (vv. 3-4). The sky as the sphere of Varuna is covered now with the light of day, now with thick clouds and falling rain, and anon with the darkness or dim light of night. These transitions from night to day and from rain-storm to the "clear shining after rain" are the result of the occult power of Varuna, the sleight-of-hand of the great magician, to use a later phrase.

The next hymn is the only hymn in book second addressed exclusively to Varuna.

1. The self-dependent Aditya's is all this,
   May he the wise transcend it by his greatness;
   Of mighty Varuna I ask approval,
   The god exceeding kind to him who worships.

2. In thine own governance may we be happy,
   We who have praised thee, Varuna, devoutly,
   Lauding thee daily like the fires at morning,
   What time the cow-like Dawns appear in splendour.

3. Varuna, may we dwell in thy protection,
   Far-famèd guide and lord of many heroes;
   Ye sons of Aditi, ye undeceived ones,
   Be kind to us, admit us to your friendship.

4. Th' all-ruling Aditya poured forth the waters,
   The rivers run by Varuna's commandment;
   Unwearied do they flow and never tarry,
   Like birds they speed them quickly on their courses.

5. As from a bond release me from transgression,
   May we swell, Varuna, thy spring of order;
   May no thread break as I weave my devotion,
   Nor mass of work before the time be shattered.

6. O Varuna, away from me put terror,
   Accept me graciously, thou righteous ruler;
   Loose me from evil as a calf from halter,
   Mine eyelid's master am I not without thee.

7. Smite us not, Asura, with those dread weapons,
Which at thy bidding wound the evil-doer;
From light may we not go forth into exile,
Disperse, that we may live, all those who hate us.

8. As formerly, so now and henceforth, strong one,
Let us address to thee adoring worship;
For on thee, undeceivable one, are founded
As on a mountain statutes everlasting.

9. Remove far hence the sins by me committed,
Let me not eat the fruit of other's action;
Full many are the dawns that yet shall redden,
O Varuna, place us alive among them.

10. If any relative or friend, O monarch,
Has spoken dread to me in slumber fearful,
Or if a thief or wolf desires to harm us,
Therefrom, O Varuna, do thou protect us.

11. O Varuna may I not lack the friendship
Of a rich lord munificent and kindly,
May I not be devoid of wealth well-ordered.
Loud may we speak at worship, girt with heroes.

The penitential element in this hymn is very similar to what we have had before. The poet prays to Varuna to loose him from his guilt (v. 5) and to remove far away his sins (v. 9). The word for sins in v. 9 means literally "debts" (*rina*). It reminds us of the familiar petition, "Forgive us our *debts*." The thought of being loosed from sin reminds us of Rev. i. 5, "Unto Him that loveth us and *loosed* us from our sins by His blood; and the parallel thought of sin being removed far away recalls the statement in Ps. ciii. 12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He *removed* our transgressions from us." As in the preceding hymns, so here forgiveness is largely identified with the remission of penalty. The prayer is:

> Smite us not, Asura, with those dread weapons,
> Which at thy bidding wound the evil-doer.

The penalty of sin is conceived as a going away into exile "where they never see the sun," in other words, death. And so the prayer for forgiveness is also a prayer for long life:

> Full many are the dawns that yet shall redden,
> O Varuna, place us alive among them.

The penalty of sin as elsewhere is also conceived as a "bond" or "halter." Compare the eighteenth Psalm, where there is mention also of the "cords" and the "snares" of death (vv. 4, 5). There is prayer also to be delivered from evil (v. 6), from thief and wolf (v. 10), from terror (v. 6) and from fear in sleep (v. 10). The poet prays that he may not suffer on account of sin either committed by himself or by another:

> Remove far hence the sins by me committed,
> Let me not eat the fruit of other's action.

This reminds us of the lines in VII. 86, 5:

Release from us the wrongs our sires committed,
As well as those committed by our selves.

But the most distinctive teaching of this hymn is that Varuna is the source and foundation of *law.*

Upon thee, undeceivable one, are founded
As on a mountain statutes everlasting.

The word translated "statutes" (*vratani*) means laws, ordinances, regulations apparently as "willed" by a ruler (if *vrata* be an old participle of *vri*). Still more remarkable is the word *rita*, which occurs twice in this hymn in the sense of *order*, law, commandment. The word *rita* means literally *course*, from *ri* to go, therefore right course or established order. Varuna's relation to the streams of water is expressed by the line:

"The rivers run by Varuna's *commandment*" (*ritam*),

which might almost be translated by

The *course* (*ritam*) of Varuna the streams do follow.

In the fifth stanza occurs the remarkable expression *kha ritasya* "spring of order," which, as Bloomfield[1] points out, is "sound for sound the same" as the Avestan *ashahe khao* (Yasna 10.4). The word *rita* "order" has a threefold application in the Rig-Veda; first, as *cosmic* order, the course of nature, the way things go; secondly, as *ritualistic* order, the established method of worship (*rite*); and thirdly, as *moral* order, the established and right way of doing things. It is certainly one of the greatest conceptions elaborated by the Indo-Iranian peoples.

The prayer, "May we swell, Varuna, thy spring of order" seems to imply co-operation with Varuna through the observance of both religious *rite* and moral right. Thus the waters of "the spring of righteousness" are made to abound. The "sense of dependence" on Varuna is also well expressed: "Mine eyelids master am I not without thee." Two great epithets emphasize Varuna's sovereignty. He is *svaraj* "self-dependent," "absolute ruler," and *samraj* "imperial ruler."

In this as in the other hymns which we have studied the Chaucerian simplicity of the similes is worthy of natice; e. g. "like fires" (v. 2), "like birds" (v. 4), "as a bond" (v. 5), "as a calf from halter" (v. 6), and hymn-composition is referred to (v. 5) under the metaphor of weaving.

The first stanza is rather obscure, and the last is without doubt editorial, since it stands at the end of a considerable number of hymns and also has a strongly marked *danastuti* or "gift-praise" character. It is possible that an ancient hymn has been subjected to editorial additions and changes before being admitted to the Collection. If so, it illustrates what Hopkins calls "the rehandling of older material."[2] We are also reminded of the textual history of the O. T. Psalter, concerning which a competent authority declares that "any system of interpretation which is to be applied to the Psalms must be ready to recognize even in a single Psalm *the juxtaposition of divergent elements*" (W. E. Barnes, *The Interpretation of the Psalms* in *Cambridge Biblical Essays*, 1909, p. 155).

[1] *Religion of the Veda,* p. 126.
[2] *Op. cit.,* p. 24.

The eighth book has two hymns to Varuna which will now be considered.

RV. VIII. 41. *To Varuna.*

1. To Varuna the powerful
And to the all-wise Marut-host
Let me now sing a hymn of praise;
Varuna guards the thoughts of men,
As herds of cows are shepherded;
None other is of any worth.

2. Him laud I with the fathers' song
In meditations framed by them,
And with Nabhaka's hymns of praise,—
Him dwelling at the rivers' source,
Surrounded by his sisters seven;
None other is of any worth.

3. Varuna hath embraced the nights,
Fixed with his magic power the dawns,
He everywhere is visible;
His dear ones following his law
Have prospered the three shining dawns;
None other is of any worth.

4. He firmly fixed the mountain peaks,
He who on earth is visible,
And measured out the ancient place,
The home of Varuna's sisters seven;
For like a herdsman strong is he,
None other is of any worth.

5. Upholder of the worlds he knows
Full well the names mysterious
And secret of the ruddy dawns;
Wise one he makes much wisdom bloom,
Even as the sky brings out each hue;
None other is of any worth.

6. In him all wisdom has its home,
As in a wheel the nave is set,
Like cows together in the stall,
Like steeds united in a team;
In haste god *Trita* reverence;
None other is of any worth.

7. He as a mantle wraps the world
And all the various tribes thereof,
Surrounding the abodes of all;
Before the house of Varuna
The gods all follow his command;
None other is of any worth.

8. As ocean hidden he ascends
As 't were the heavens in haste, what time
He fixes worship in the clans;
With shining fort all magic wiles
He scattered, climbed the vault of heaven;
None other is of any worth.

9. His are the white, far-seeing pair,
That up above the three earths live,
And the three upper realms do fill;
Firm is the seat of Varuna,
Over the seven he beareth sway;
None other is of any worth.

10. The white ones and the brilliant-robed
The black ones, too, he made by law,
The ancient home he measured out;
With pillars fixed apart the worlds,
As the Unborn he propped the sky;
None other is of any worth.

A somewhat mystical and difficult hymn. This much is clear, however, that it celebrates Varuna's cosmic power, especially his relation to the nights, dawns, days, rivers, and mountains. Varuna (v. 10) made the black ones (nights) as well as the white ones (days) and the ones clad in gleaming garments (sunrise and sunset). He embraces the nights (apparently by means of sunset and sunrise). Through his magic power (*maya*) he established the dawns. He dwells at the source of the rivers in the midst of his seven sisters (v. 2). Compare RV. I. 65, 4 "Kinsman of rivers, of sisters brother" (said of Agni). He is called a "hidden ocean" (v. 8). He established the heights of the mountains (v. 4). His are the two white far-seeing ones (sun and moon probably), which dwell on high above the three earths. As a mantle he wraps the world and all that it contains (v. 7). Is this the mantle of bright light by day and of dim light by night? With shining foot Varuna scattered magic wiles (*mayah*) and climbed the vault of heaven (v. 8). This looks very much like *Vishnu's* three steps, earth, atmosphere and zenith. Thus in this hymn Varuna clearly has to do with day, night and water; in other words, he is at once day-god, night-god and water-god. Varuna is so universally revealed by day and by night, in storm and in calm, that he is said to be visible everywhere on the earth (vv. 3, 4). He measured out the ancient (or eastern) place (vv. 4, 10), whatever that may mean. He fixed asunder earth and heaven and propped the sky. So much for Varuna's cosmic power and activities.

But Varuna as the upholder of the worlds is not only powerful, but also *wise*. As such, he makes wisdom to thrive. All wisdom finds its centre and meeting place in him, as the wheel in the nave, as cows in the cow-pen, and as horses in the team. He knows the hidden and secret names of the dawns. This reminds us of a passage in another mystical

hymn VII. 87, 4 "The names borne by the cow are three times seven."

Varuna is the supreme ruler. He rules over the seven (v. 9). Not only the nights and dawns (vv. 3, 10), but also the gods follow his law (v. 7). The statement, "Before the house of Varuna the gods all follow his command," reminds us of I. 25, 13 "His spies are seated round about."

This hymn contains references not only to good magic but also to bad magic. Varuna by his magic power establishes the dawns (v. 3) and by his shining foot scatters (evil) magic arts (v. 8). Perhaps a reference to the magic arts of the demons of darkness overcome by Varuna.

The sacred numbers three and seven play a large part in this hymn and indeed throughout the Rig-Veda even as in the Bible.

The metre of this hymn is the *mahapankti*, a kind of double *gayatri*, consisting of six eight-syllable lines. Each stanza ends in a common refrain, which when translated freely reads, "None other is of any worth," literally "Let any others burst." The hymn is assigned by tradition to *Nabhaka* mentioned in stanza second. The word "burst" (*nabhantam*) looks like a punning reference to the name Nābhāka. As a bit of Vedic slang the line might be translated by Let any other ones "go hang." The prayer for the pardon of sin does not occur in this hymn.

The second of the two Varuna hymns found in book eighth is also cosmic in character like the first.

RV. VIII. 42, 1-3.

1. The all-possessing Asura established
   The heaven, and measured earth's extent and compass;
   Entered all worlds as universal ruler,
   All these indeed are Varuna's regulations.

2. Then honour Varuna the exalted, praising
   The all-wise guardian of the world immortal.
   May he extend to us threefold protection,
   O earth and heaven, cherish us in your bosom.

3. O god, this song of one who tries his utmost
   Sharpen, and, Varuna, skill bestow and insight;
   Let us ascend the ship that gives good passage,
   Whereby we may cross over all misfortune.

The last three stanzas of this hymn are in a different metre and are addressed to the *Asvins*. They are not translated. This hymn illustrates then "the juxtaposition of divergent elements" [1] due to "processes of secondary grouping and adaptation." [2] The author of this hymn prays to Varuna to sharpen his skill (*daksa*) and insight (*kratu*) as a poet. He describes himself as one who does his best in sacred song, and he wishes to do better still. Deliverance is conceived as a being carried in a boat across a river, an inheritance from the Panjāb.

We have now completed the study of ten Vedic hymns devoted to Varuna. Two of the ten, namely I. 24 and VIII. 42, are devoted in part

[1] W. E. Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 155.
[2] Bloomfield, *Hymns of the Atharvaveda*, SBE. xlii, p. lxxii.

to other gods as well as to Varuna, and several other hymns which have not been translated also contain Varuna sections. Eight hymns are devoted exclusively to Varuna, namely I. 25, II. 28, V. 85, VII. 86, 87, 88, 89 and VIII. 41, and also eight hymns (the same as the above-mentioned list after putting I. 24, 6-15 in the place of VIII. 41) are penitential in character. These penitential hymns are strikingly similar in spirit to the Hebrew and Babylonian penitential psalms. Concerning the Babylonian penitential psalms Prof. Morris Jastrow[1] writes: "The two parts which presented themselves with overpowering force to the penitent were the anger of the deity and the necessity of appeasing that anger. . . . . The man afflicted was a sinner, and the corollary to this position was that misfortunes come in consequence of sin. Through the evils alone which overtook one, it became clear to an individual that he had sinned against the deity. Within this circle of ideas the penitential psalms of Babylonia move. . . . . An ethical spirit was developed . . . . that surprises us by its loftiness and comparative purity. . . . . These psalms indeed show the religious and ethical thought of Babylonia at its best." All of which, *mutatis mutandis*, may be said with equal truth of the Vedic penitential hymns.

The close similarity in thought and spirit which exists between the Babylonian and the Vedic penitential psalms has led Professor Oldenberg to postulate a Babylonian origin for Varuna. In about twenty-seven hymns of the Rig-Veda the dual divinities *Mitra-Varuna* are celebrated. But Mitra is the Persian Mithra "sun." According to Oldenberg's hypothesis, then, Mitra and Varuna were originally Sun and Moon. The Adityas or sons of Aditi, of which Varuna is chief, are sometimes given as seven in number. Oldenberg thinks that the seven Adityas were the sun and moon and five planets and that they were first studied and worshipped in the Euphrates Valley. To show that an original character as moon is not inconsistent with the lofty attributes ascribed to Varuna in the Rig-Veda, Oldenberg[2] refers to a Babylonian hymn addressed to *Nannar-Sin*, the moon-god of Ur of the Chaldees, who is invoked in such language as this: "O lord, chief of the gods, who on earth and in heaven alone is exalted, ... merciful one, begetter of everything, who among living things occupies a lofty seat. . . . . Thy strong command produces right and proclaims justice to mankind. Thy strong command, through the distant heavens and the wide earth, extends to whatever there is. . . . . Lord, in heaven is [thy] sovereignty, on earth is thy sovereignty. . . . . O King of Kings, ... whose divinity is not surpassed by any other!"[3] In Ur of the Chaldees the moon-god was the supreme object of worship, and the sun was regarded as the offspring of the moon. It is interesting to recall that according to Hebrew tradition Abraham, the tribal father of the Hebrews, went forth from Ur of the Chaldees. Oldenberg's hypothesis has not met with much favour at the hands of scholars. If Oldenberg's contention were true, that Varuna was originally a moon-

[1] *Religion of Babylonia and Assyria,* Chap. xviii.
[2] *Varuna und die Adityas,* ZDMG., No. 50, S. 67.
[3] Jastrow, *op. cit.,* p. 303 ff.

god and had a Babylonian origin, then we might perhaps regard both Varuna and Jehovah as offshoots of one original Babylonian source. But whatever the facts may be, this much is sure that the Vedic Varuna is virtually the ethical equivalent of the Zoroastrian *Ahura Mazda*, of the Babylonian *Nannar-Sin*, and of the Hebrew *Yahweh*.

Since Oldenberg's hypothesis was first made public, the compound Mitra-Varuna has apparently been discovered in the cuneiform inscriptions. Hommel,[1] who by the way supports Oldenberg in his theory of Varuna, cites an inscription which he translates "In the home of *Mitra* and *Marun* (i. e. in the home of the sun and moon) they (the seven) are full of corn." And Winckler has lately discovered an inscription at *Boghaz Keui*, the old Hittite capital in Asia Minor, containing (as read by him) the names *mi-it-ra-as-si-il u-ru-w-na-as-si-el*, i. e. Mitra-Varuna (*assel* being a combining suffix). See Eduard Meyer's *Geschichte des Altertums*, 1909, S. 802.

The original nature of Varuna as (possibly) the moon is not dependent upon the truth or falsity of Oldenberg's hypothesis of a Babylonian origin. Varuna is confessedly a "prehistoric" god, that is his development belongs very largely to the Indo-Iranian period, anterior to the composition of the Vedic hymns. He is also a somewhat "opaque" god, as Prof. Bloomfield expresses it, his original physical basis (if he ever had one) being largely obscured. This obscuring of the original character of Varuna is doubtless due to the lapse of time and to changes which had taken place in the environment of the Vedic Aryans. In the ten hymns which we have studied Varuna appears predominantly as the lord of *light*, and in this character is much more closely associated with the sun than with the moon. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that Varuna's character as a Light-god might be derived from the moon as well as from the sun, especially when we remember that the actual process of derivation took place not in the Panjāb, but somewhere to the north and west, in other words, under different skies. Varuna presides over diverse and even contradictory realms. He is at once day-god, and night-god, and rain-god. Light and darkness and rain are the principal physical qualities with which he is associated. The problem is, what will best furnish a starting point for the development of Varuna's three-fold nature as god of light, darkness, and rain? Hillebrandt, the chief German co-worker and rival of Oldenberg in the field of Vedic mythology, thinks that the moon alone answers all these conditions.[2] Varuna's character as lord of light can be derived from the moon as a luminous body; his character as a night-god, from the fact that the moon shines at night; and his character as a rain-god, from the close connection of the moon with dampness and dew, as the anthropologists all point out. That in the Vedic hymns Varuna is more closely connected with the sun than with the moon may be taken as due to a shifting of the environment from north to south. In the later history of Varuna his Vedic character as "light" drops out, and he remains for the *Brahmana* ritual a night-god as

[1] PSBA. No. 21, pp. 137-139.
[2] *Vedische Mythologie*, 1902, Bd. III, S. 45.

contrasted with Mitra the day-god, and in still later times a mere water-god, a kind of Indian Neptune. All this illustrates the fact that even in the Rig-Veda Varuna is a *waning* god. As Hillebrandt says: "In the Rig-Veda he enjoys but the last moment of his full fame." [1]

But there is another possible explanation of the many-sided nature of Varúna. The sky is the special sphere of Varuna in his character as day-god, night-god, and rain-god. We may distinguish between the "form" and "matter" of the sky, to use philosophical terminology. As regards form, the visible sky is a great vault bounded by the horizon. As regards matter, the sky which is unchanging in its form or mathematical shape, is à theatre for the display of the great optical and meteorological transformations of night and day, rain and sunshine. We have already had references to the *maya* or "occult power" of Varuna in hymns V. 85 and VIII. 41. This same power of effecting magic transformations in the atmosphere is ascribed in another hymn of the fifth book, namely V. 63, to the joint deities Mitra-Varuna. A translation of this hymn is herewith given, as it bears strongly upon the point under consideration.

RV. V. 63. *To Mitra-Varuna.*

1. In highest heaven ye twain united mount your car,
   Joint guardians of law and order fixed and firm;
   What man, O Mitra-Varuna, is blessed of you,
   On him the honied rain down from the sky doth stream.

2. As joint imperial rulers govern ye the world,
   Varuna-Mitra sun-like at the sacrifice;
   The rain, gift of enduring life for us, we ask;
   The thunderers traverse the heaven and the earth.

2. Joint Kings, strong bulls, and lords of heaven and earth are ye,
   O Mitra-Varuna, present and active everywhere;
   With gleaming storm-clouds girt ye twain attend the roar,
   And *through the Asura's magic power* cause heaven to rain.

4. Your *magic power*, O Mitra-Varuna, is in the heaven;
   The sun, the gleaming weapon, flasheth as the light,
   Him in the sky with cloud and rain ye do conceal;
   The honied drops, Parjanya, now begin to flow.

5. The wind-gods yoke their chariot swift for pomp and strife,
   Even as a hero, Mitra-Varuna, in war;
   The thunderers traverse the gleaming atmosphere,
   Joint ruling ones, sprinkle us with the milk of heaven.

6. A voice, in truth, refreshing, gleaming, shattering,
   Parjanya utters now, O Mitra-Varuna;
   The wind-gods clothe themselves with clouds *through magic power;*
   Cause ye the sky to rain, the red, the spotless one.

7. Through law and *through the Asura's magic power* ye guard
   The ordinances, Mitra-Varuna, wise gods;

[1] *What to Learn from Vedic Mythology,* p. 13.

Through order fixed ye twain do govern all the world;
The sun in heaven ye stationed as a gleaming car.

This is clearly a rain-song containing a prayer for rain and filled with allusions to the *Maruts* or "storm-winds," *Parjanya*, the deified "rain-cloud," and to rain, thunder, clouds, water-drops, and sky-milk. Four times the word *maya* or "occult power" is mentioned in this description of a rain-storm, as if to suggest that the whole atmospheric drama of rain and sunshine is due to the "magic power" (*maya*) of some "mysterious lord" (*Asura*).

The one visible sky, then, is the scene of many magic transformations, of which Varuna as at once day-god, night-god, and rain-god, may be taken as the cause. The changeless form of the sky then represents Varuna's changelessness and all-embracing transcendence, while its changing matter as seen in the manifold transformations which there take place may be taken as representing the magic play of Varuna's creative activity. This hypothesis is supported by the time-honoured etymological equation, viz. Vedic Varuna = Greek ouranos, "heaven." It is true, there is a slight phonetic difficulty in this identification, but not such as to prevent such scholars as Brugmann, Macdonell, and Bloomfield, from accepting it. According to this etymology Varuna-Ouranos is derived from the root *var* to cover and means the sky as the "coverer" or "encompasser." All scholars are agreed that Vedic Dyaus = Greek Zeus. It is also probable, as we have seen, that Vedic Varuna = Greek ouranos. There was this difference in the development of meaning, that whereas in Greece Zeus came to mean "heaven-god" and "ouranos" retained its original meaning "heaven," in India *dyaus retained* (largely) its original meaning "heaven" and Varuna came to mean "heaven-god." And Varuna as the god of the sky would be the god equally of the day-sky, the night-sky and the rain-sky. This conclusion is not based upon the etymology of the word "Varuna," but upon the texts we have studied. The commonly accepted etymology of Varuna is cited only as an additional witness in a cumulative argument. The argument would not be affected essentially by its omission.

In conclusion, we may refer to a fundamental problem connected with the investigation of Vedic mythology, namely what are the factors to which it is due? Hillebrandt has brought out more fully than any other scholar the signficance of the fact that the Vedic commonwealth consisted of *different clans*. How can one doubt that each clan made a contribution to the Vedic pantheon? As Hillebrandt well says: Vedic mythology is not a system but a conglomerate, a kind of mythological "confusion of tongues," which arose through the coming together and fusion of the traditions of different clans.[1] The same scholar also says that in the future we shall have to pay more attention to the multiplicity of ethnological elements than to the diversity which exists among the Vedic gods,[2] another way of saying that the multiplicity of Vedic gods is due to the multiplicity of Vedic clans. This is the ethnological factor. Furthermore the reading of

[1] *Vedische Mythologie,* Bd. III, S. xii.
[2] *Op. cit.,* S. 52.

such a book as Jastrow's *Religion of Babylonia and Assyria* brings to one's attention the fact that the equilibrium of the Babylonian pantheon was constantly being disturbed by political changes. If two districts came together on equal terms, their patron gods also would be associated on equal terms, perhaps as husband and wife; if on unequal terms, then the same thing would hold good of their gods, who would now be related to each other as father and son or even as master and servant (*op. cit.* p. 49). Something similar must have taken place among the Vedic clans, although from the paucity of historic evidence it will always be difficult to trace the process. We know this much at least that the Rig-Veda Collection is the religious precipitate of the thought of the *confederated* Vedic clans. This is the political factor. It may be illustrated in this way. Suppose the various Semitic tribes of Palestine and the adjacent regions, Hebrews, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Phoenicians, Aramaeans, etc., had under the pressure of some strong non-Semitic foe formed among themselves a long-standing political alliance. According to ancient practice such a political alliance would ordinarily have involved a *religious* alliance as well, and the special god of each tribe would have become more or less an object of worship for all the allied tribes. Suppose, too, that the poets of each tribe sang the praises of their own particular god in sacred hymns, and that gradually, as the product of reflection, gods were united in pairs on the basis of resemblance in nature or as symbolical of the political union of clans, and finally that all the gods even were united as objects of adoration in the same hymn. And, lastly, suppose that after centuries of life thus politically and religiously federated the sacred poetry of all the confederated tribes was brought together into one great collection, in which hymns to Yahweh would stand side by side with hymns to Baal, Chemosh, Molech, Ashtoreth, etc., and in which would also be found hymns to such dual gods as Yahweh- Chemosh and Baal-Molech, and hymns also dedicated to the Semitic "all-gods." Something like this may actually have taken place in the history of the Vedic Aryans. And there were other factors, geographical, climatic, and cultural, which must have helped to mould the religious views of the Vedic clans in the course of their long wandering from their original home (wherever it was) to the "promised land" in India.

In the light of these considerations it is conceivable that the union of Varuna with Mitra and with Indra, as expressed in the dual compounds *Mitra-Varuna* and *Indra-Varuna*, may either be an inheritance from the prehistoric past (as in the case of Mitra-Varuna on Oldenberg's interpretation), or may be due to speculation on the common aspects of Mitra and Varuna and of Indra and Varuna respectively, or again may reflect the political union of clans. The investigation of Varuna's connection with Mitra and with Indra affords subject matter for further studies, which have not been attempted in this paper.

But in the light of the ten hymns specially addressed to Varuna which have been the subject of our study we are justified in making the conjecture that some one Vedic clan, perhaps the clan of the *Vasisthas*, had Varuna as their chief god, and, under the influence of some *Rishi* having

the spirit of an Old Testament prophet, initiated the most ethical and spiritual type of hymn in the Rig-Veda Collection—the *penitential* type. But whatever the origin of this type of hymn may have been, it is true, as Andrew Lang says, that "it would be difficult to overstate the ethical nobility of certain Vedic hymns, which even now affect us with a sense of the 'hunger and thirst after righteousness' so passionately felt by the Hebrew Psalmists."[1] And I think all will agree that Prof. Hopkins' estimate is correct when he says that "Varuna beside the loftiest figure in the Hellenistic pantheon stands like a god beside a man."[2] But notwithstanding his moral elevation, Varuna was not a popular god. In fact, he was too remote, too austere, too holy to be popular. And so Varuna, the ethical god of the Vedic pantheon, was displaced by other gods , especially by Agni the priestly god and Indra the warrior god. Had there been a succession of Rishis similar in experience and thought to those who composed the penitential hymns, then Varuna might have prevailed, just as Yahweh in Israel prevailed over the *Baalim*. And if Varuna had prevailed, the religious history of India would have been different from what it has been. "If Varuna had prevailed," as Prof. Bloomfield says,[3] "India would have become monotheistic and theocratic, which it never did."

[1] *Myth, Ritual and Religion.* Vol. II., p. 129.
[2] *Religions of India,* p. 172.
[3] *The Religion of the Veda,* p. 200.

APPENDIX

In the preceding discussion the Hebrew penitential hymns have been referred to. In order to facilitate comparison a translation of one of them is herewith presented.

Psalm xxxii.

I. Strophe.

1. *Blessed* the one whose *transgression* is *forgiven*, whose *sin* is *covered!*
2. *Blessed* the *man* unto whom *Yahweh imputeth* not *iniquity!* (his spirit being guileless).
3. When I kept *silence*, my *bonës* waxed *old* through my *roaring* all the day *long;*
4. *For* by *day* and by *night heavy* on me was thy *hand.*
5. [My *condition*] was *changed* to *misery*
   what time the *thorn smote* me.

II. Strophe.

1. My *sin* I make *known* to thee, and mine *iniquity* I do *not cover;*
2. (I said) I *confess* concerning my *transgression* to *Yahweh* and thou *forgavest* the iniquity of my *sin.*
3. *Therefore* let every *devotee pray* unto thee in the *time* of *distress;*
4. At the *outburst* of *many waters* unto *him* they *reach* not.
5. Thou, my *hiding-place*, from *straits preservest* me, as *deliverer surroundest* me.

III. Strophe.

1. Let me *instruct* thee and *teach* thee in the way to *go*, let me *counsel* thee, mine *eye* being upon thee:
2. Be *not* as *horse* as *mule, without understanding,*
3. With *harness* of bridle and *halter* to be *muzzled*, so as *not* to come *near* thee.
4. Many *sorrows* are for the *wicked*, but whoso *trusteth* in Yahweh *loving kindness surroundeth* him.
5. Be *glad* in Yahweh and *exult*, ye *righteous*,
   and be *jubilant*, all ye *upright* in heart.

It will be seen at a glance that Hebrew poetry is related to Vedic poetry very much as the unconventional lines of Walt Whitman are related to the careful verse of Tennyson. Still Hebrew verse has some method and system. The thirty-second Psalm, as we have it, consists of three strophes, each containing five pentameter lines. The lines are pentameter in the sense that each line has five word beats, that is, three and two, each accented word being printed in italics. Hebrew poetry is probably more primitive in character, though not in age, than Vedic poetry. It is possible, as Dr. Briggs [1] holds, that the third strophe and some phrases also of the other two strophes may consist of editorial and other additions. We have found the same kind of editorial additions in the Vedic hymns. The text, too, has been corrected in one or two places on the authority of the versions.

[1] *The Book of Psalms* (1906) in *International Critical Commentary*, Vol. I, pp. 276-284.

Just one point of contact between Hebrew and Vedic thought may be mentioned, namely the close connection between sin and suffering which is found in both alike. According to the very personal account in the 32nd Psalm the transgressor was hard pressed under Yahweh's hand and was scourged as it were with a scourge of thorns. The reference is clearly to pain of body as well as to pain of spirit. Deliverance came when he confessed his transgressions to Yahweh and was forgiven by Him. Thus out of a deep experience of sin and its attendant misery and of the grace of Yahweh in forgiving the penitent sinner were born the two Beatitudes with which the psalm opens:

Blessed the one whose *transgression* is forgiven, whose sin is covered!

Blessed the *man* unto whom *Yahweh imputeth* not *iniquity.*

The thought of these two beatitudes, while not explicitly stated in so many words in the Vedic hymns, is yet clearly implied. Compare:

"When shall I *happy-hearted* see his mercy?" VII. 86, 2

"Slave-like will I, when once my sin is pardoned,
Serve Him the merciful, erewhile the angry." VII. 86, 7.

"O Lord, have mercy and forgive." VII. 89, 1-4.

"Who showeth mercy even to the sinner,
O that we might in Varuna's eyes be guiltless." VII. 87, 7.

"Cast all these sins away like loosened fetters,
And thy dear worshippers may we again be." V. 85, 8.

Thus if there is any difference between Vedic and Hebrew penitential hymns, it is just this that the consciousness that one's sins have been forgiven, the note of joy at the restoration of the face and favour of God, is more firmly struck in the Hebrew Psalms than in the Vedic.

As we have seen, the Vedic Aryans, the Babylonians, and the Hebrews, all had penitential hymns. These three peoples as independent witnesses bear impressive testimony to the fact that *repentance* is fundamental to true religion.

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